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Promoting Stress Management Among Childcare Workers

Ciara Williams

A Capstone Project for the Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies

Introduction

“Staff working in Children and Families Division were the worst affected by stress, reporting the highest levels of absenteeism (with 54% of staff reporting being off sick in the previous 6 months), the poorest well-being, and the highest level of organisational constraints” (Coffey & Liverpool John Moores University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2004)

Stress can impact the immune system and put the body at risk for chronic illness such as heart disease, obesity, depression and anxiety to name a few. Baumgartner et al. (2009) identified stress factors that childcare providers may experience in their work environments [comma] including “work conditions, work events, client factors and external factors”. Examples of some of these factors could be the wide age differences and educational backgrounds between the providers in a given center. These environments serve primarily for the facilitation of children's activities and require workers to pay close and constant attention to children, which can be more stressful than one might anticipate. Child Care Workers might not be aware of how stress affects them and their interactions with children. Others just simply do not understand the signs of stress and the effects it can have on the body, their performance, and those around them. Unmanaged stress can take a toll on one’s body, affecting a person's health and wellbeing whether it be physical, cognitive, emotional or behavioral. In order to assist the staff at G3Kids to successfully manage the stress they face in the workplace, I will create a one-day workshop that will encourage Child Care Workers (CCW’s) to recognize signs of stress and practice stress relieving techniques. The workshop will be conducted for a group of Child Care Workers and gymnastics Coaches at the G3Kids site in San Diego, California.

Needs Statement

How does work-related stress impact child care providers? When considering Child Care professions for students in the Human Development and Family Studies program, job-related stress is an important area of concern. According to (Gerstenblatt, 2014), little research has been done on child care provider's experiences. Child Care Workers deal with job-related stress just like other workers, but with a slightly bigger impact because of the children they care for. Research shows that job-related stress can impact multiple aspects of our personal lives (Lee, 2018). Therefore, it is important to research the impact of stress on Child Care Workers in their work environments. The focal group for my proposed project is childcare providers, and more specifically the employees at G3Kids in San Diego, a site that incorporates gymnastics instruction with learning through play. With the presence of the COVID-19 pandemic the CCW's had to adapt their roles to better serve the community and their needs with minimal to no training contributing job-related stress. First I will provide some empirical research about stress and stress management including important terms and techniques, then describe how stress can impact CCW's and the important work they do, and lastly a brief description of the capstone project.

Stress

According to Lee (2018), "Child care providers have job-related stresses, which affect their physical and mental health, ultimately leading to a variety of concerns including, high turnover and overall quality of services." To better understand this, it is important to identify the

stressors as well as the effects of stress on their physical and mental health. Stress generally refers to a mental state or events or stressors that can trigger a response in the body known as stress response. Insel and Roth 2019, help distinguish the difference between the terms stressor and stress response by saying, a stressor refers more to the physical or psychological event that then triggers reactions that could be emotional or physical, the reaction itself is the person's stress response. "Thoughts or feelings about an approaching event can be just as stressful as the event itself"(Insel & Roth 2019). Stress responses include both physiological and psychological reactions like sweaty palms and a pounding chest, with feelings of anxiety and depression. The stressor identified by child care providers in the Baumgartner et al.(2009) paper were their work conditions, production of work events and dealing with various clients and their related factors, as well as the external, or personal factors faced by the child care provider. Similar stress factors were reported by other participants in other studies.

Physical And Mental Effects Of Stress

To better understand these stressor and when we are experiencing stressful situations or events there are physical signs to be aware of, such as a pounding heart or clammy palms among others. When the body is experiencing stress our nervous and endocrine system activate glands within our body to trigger physical stress responses in the textbook by Insel & Roth 2019, they listed a few physical responses. The responses included developing more acute hearing and vision, and the body increases the amount of perspiration produced to cool the skin. These physical and emotional reactions can take a toll on the body and lead to negative impacts on your

overall well being. Related research on job stress conducted on CCW's in Spain found that CCW's expressed an increase in physical health problems related to stress from their work environments. In research from del Valle et al. (2014) "The complaints most commonly reported in this sample are back pain (42%), insomnia (37.1%) and headache (34.5%)", Also experiencing lack of interest or involvement at work.

Stressors at Childcare Centers

When considering the importance of CCW's and their roles in child care centers, previous research in various similar studies done by Coffey , and Baumgartner et al. [year], as well as others have identified a theme of stressors that typically occur in child care centers. The previously mentioned work all divided the stressor into about three categories. The first deals with the context of the job, or the organization and development of professional growth, having or not having overall job support and defining roles and responsibilities. The second is the content of the work, which refers more specifically to the resources available to the CCW's and the condition of those resources, as well as expected workload, task, and work schedule. The third category recognizes the importance of personal external factors experienced by the CCW that can play a role in job stress." The routine of the school day, the amount of time spent in non-instructional activities (Lieberman and Miller 1978), noise, physical work, diminished privacy, or isolation from other adults are examples of stressful child care arrangement situations which might contribute childcare providers' stress" (Baumgartner et al., 2009). G3Kids has a similar routine problem, a lot of time in breakout groups with children is spent facilitated by minimally experienced CCW's, who generally have a hard time creating instructional activities,

and are isolated from other adults that could potentially assist in stressful arrangements like breakout groups.

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic the CCW's at G3Kids were required to make an unexpected transition, which increased the feelings of stress and burnout over the course of a few months. To better serve the community the owners of G3Kids decided to create a program that qualified our establishment as an essential business because we transitioned into a more all day child care facility, having children present during school hours and CCW's being responsible for facilitating the childrens zoom class, tutoring, helping with homework, and any other school related task, in a addition to writing a weekly progress report for parents. For some CCW's the transition was more difficult than for others due to experience levels and backgrounds, age and previous feelings towards job satisfaction. The potential stress felt by the CCW's during this transition was becoming more apparent everyday. G3kids began to experience constant employee absenteeism, and a decrease in the quality of care given to clients. The transition proved to be hard on the whole company, but it was important to focus on the impact it had on the CCW's since they were the ones dealing with direct care, and had the greatest impact on the children.

Effects of Stress on Childcare Workers

A Child Care Worker's role is vital to the clients they serve as well as the organization they work for, and some mistakes made from the result of stressed, overwhelmed, or burnt out employees may cause serious consequences when working with children. Feelings of fatigue and exhaustion, a result of work stress, cause a CCW to be less attentive, engaged or aware of the

children around them when working, which heightens the risk for potential accidents [and decreases meaningful interactions with children. After examining the previously mentioned physical and mental effects of stress, like fatigue and absenteeism, it is clear to understand that those feelings can cause a low-quality and unsatisfactory delivery of service by the CCWs. To mitigate this, it is important to develop and practice healthy stress management techniques to better deal with stressors in the workplace and other environments. Stressors can arise, and/ or compromise the quality of service or impact the CCW or those around them in adverse ways, and having techniques on how to deal with stress can limit those experiences.

Coping With Stress

Many techniques of dealing with stress are widely accessible and can be found with a simple google search. While researching healthy stress management strategies and coping techniques to teach to the participants, I incorporated literature from a variety of sources to get the most inclusive options. While the only self controllable factor in work stress environments is the personal reaction, it is important to note that changes in job context, and content of work to improve job satisfaction require conversations with the management and leadership of the establishment. If the work stress is an overwhelming problem in the workplace, for multiple CCW's it is possible that more open communication, and development needs to be had among the employees and employer.

The good thing about stress is that it is controllable and a wide range of techniques are available to anyone. Stress management is customizable and can be developed as often as needed to achieve a more healthy lifestyle and overall wellness. Stress management has both productive

and counterproductive approaches to managing stress, it is important to consider the healthy options such as mindfulness practices, journaling, or exercise. Be mindful of the counterproductive approaches that can cause psychological disorders and influence unhealthy diet choices. Some counterproductive approaches to avoid when considering coping strategies and techniques is to avoid the use of drugs and alcohol (Insel & Roth, 2019).

Stress Management Techniques

The strategies and techniques practiced and presented in my project to the CCW's at G3Kids included exercise, mindfulness, and practicing open communication. According to Insel & Roth 2019, regular exercise and walking can decrease anxiety and blood pressure, along with maintaining a healthy diet. Healthy Communication is a beneficial technique in stress management because having good communication allows for the creation of relationships. Relationships and connections allow people to create strong social support groups to help in situations of distress.

Orientation To The Capstone Project

G3Kids is a gymnastics-based athletic program and interactive learning academy. As a children's active learning center, G3Kids teaches grit, grace and growth in confidence while maximizing brain stimulation through a kinaesthetic learning method; active bodies equal growing minds." (About G3Kids,2021). Given the increase in stress and burnout expressed by the coaches at G3Kids it is likely that they are not aware of how stress might be detrimental to them, their well-being, the children they serve and their coworkers. In order to increase their

awareness and teach ways of managing stress I intend to provide a 1-day workshop on stress awareness and management for coaches at G3Kids.

Theory

Lazarus's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping examines the psychological process a person goes through when experiencing stress, with consideration to the environment and the person's own perspective. I used research from Berjot and Gillet (2011) that examines and explains The Stress and Coping Model that was created by Richard Lazarus, as a framework for examining individual stress and coping processes and its influence on physical and mental health. The theory focuses on psychological stress and the individual's cognitive response to stressors and the environment. This response involves a person's appraisal process or evaluation of whether the stressor is taxing or endangering, followed by the second phase which involves the evaluation of available coping skills, or how they will manage the demands. The most important distinction made about stress is that stress is individual and seen as a transaction between a person and their environment. The way a person categorizes a specific stressor and how they determine what resources are available to help mediate the demands are essential parts of the appraisal part of Lazarus's theory.

It is important to consider the transactional nature of stress, to better understand how each CCW can have different responses when working with children. For instance, one identified stressor in research from Baumgartner et al. (2009) was work events. Each individual will appraise or categorize these situations differently depending on various factors such as experience, knowledge, comfortability, and available resources. If a past work event, like parents

night out, has been particularly stressful for one of the CCW's at G3Kids, they may be less inclined to want to work the event or may have anxiety leading up to the event. In contrast, a coworker that may have more experience working this type of event, or just generally feels more comfortable with work events, may not experience any stressors leading up to the event. "Two concepts are central to any psychological stress theory: appraisal, i.e., individuals' evaluation of the significance of what is happening for their well-being, and coping, i.e., individuals' efforts in thought and action to manage specific demands (cf. Lazarus 1993) "(Krohne & Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz Germany, 2002). Once understanding the variety of responses one can have, we are more likely to better understand how CCWs' work environment can cause stress.

The way the theory relates to my project and the delivery of it to my participants is that it allows the reader to understand how stress can impact each individual differently. Stress is individual and can only be appraised by each individual in the situation or environment. Relating this theory to my project helped me adapt a workshop that would be inclusive and meaningful for the participants, while recognizing differences in developmental stages and backgrounds. Because perception can vary for each individual, it is important to mention the different backgrounds the various CCW's at G3Kids are involved in. A few CCW's have educational or professional backgrounds in Business, Kinesiology, Child Development, and some Unknown or with no previous experience. Given the difference in backgrounds, the CWW with a business background, or the provider with little to no experience may experience more stress in work environments like tutoring or facilitating the childrens' zoom classes.

Consideration of Diversity

G3Kids is a family owned small business in San Diego, CA; their core value is to emphasize “Active Bodies Growing Minds” (*About G3Kids*). The staff is mostly composed of women between the ages of about 17 and 45 years old. According to Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, most providers at G3Kids are in the developmental age range of young adults, while others are adolescents and a few in the stage of adulthood. It is important to consider Erickson’s theory of development to take into account that some providers in high school are still working through finding themselves and their own identity. In contrast, the older providers are motivated to form more meaningful, long term relationships, establish careers and be a part of the community. Some CCWs may find some of the skills and objectives required to have success in the stage as difficult to master. For adolescents, when they are unable to master fidelity, or being able to accept oneself and others regardless of differences, it can lead to role confusion and feelings of low self-esteem. Failure to achieve the objectives in the other two development stages can lead to feelings of loneliness, unproductivity and even depression. Other diversity considerations would be the provider's differences in work experience, career aspirations, and education/educational backgrounds, like business or gymnastics coaching, as well as income (McLeod & Simply Psychology, 2008).

San Diego is a very culturally diverse city and although G3Kids is not completely representative of the population as a whole when looking at the demographics of the clients they serve or their employees, they provide important and essential services for working families.

Females hold the majority at G3Kids, with the staff consisting of mostly Caucasian appearing women.

My biggest challenge in conducting this project while considering the diversity of my participants is the variety of developmental stages of the coaches and how they will interact with the workshop and interpret the information. The project is designed in a way that will be simple enough to understand for the seventeen year olds in the group, as well as for the participants who are mothers with their own children. Whether in High School or Career training, stress management is a transferable skill to have. My goal is to make the workshop fun and engaging while also personally significant by having the participants share and collaborate as a group. In thinking that they can learn as much from each other, and their own experiences when dealing with stressors, as they can from the information provided in the workshop, I have focused on keeping the atmosphere comfortable and a safe space for encouraging open communication and sharing.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the hour and half workshop hosted at G3Kids Pacific Beach location:

1. Participants will be able to identify three sources of stress in a child care setting.
2. Participants will be able to indicate three negative effects of stress on childcare providers and their interactions while working with children.
3. Participants will be able to identify three stress-reducing techniques they can use to deal with stress.

Methods

Participants

I will be conducting the workshop during one of the monthly G3Kids staff meetings. The presentation will take place in Pacific Beach, a small neighborhood sitting on the bay in San Diego, California. G3Kids has approximately 20 employees, and most attend the monthly staff meetings so I expect I will have at least 16-18 participants attend the workshop. The participants range in age from the youngest employee being 17 years old to the oldest being in their mid to late forties. The educational level of the participants varies greatly as well as education background or career aspirations. Some employees are in highschool, others in college and a few in between careers with various educational backgrounds related to business, childcare, and kinesthetic occupations. Most employees at G3Kids are representative of the demographic data of the county, being female, most having a Caucasian appearance and being English speaking.

Procedures and Materials

The workshop will be conducted during a two hour staff meeting. I have been allotted an hour and fifteen minutes to put on my presentation. The presentation will be divided into three phases that correspond to my three learning outcomes. I would have led the group through a five minute walking meditation in the gym to start, then introduced journaling prompts for stress journaling, and encouraged participants to think of at least one coworker they can confide in when stressed, and someone at home, or a good friend or family member they can talk their

feelings out with. While sharing the strategies, I will focus on keeping an open posture and remaining vulnerable by sharing my experiences using each technique.

First, I will begin the workshop by introducing myself for those coaches that may not know me and explaining the idea of the workshop and how it will go today. I will then pass out a notecard and pen to each participant for the ice breaker activity. I will explain the activity and put the participants in pairs to find 10 things in common with each other. After five minutes they will rotate partners and record the same things on the other side of their notecards. After the group has completed both rounds I will ask the pairs to share the top five things they found between their current partner. Once everyone has shared their answers I will ask everyone to think about what stress is to them, and pass out the worksheets and ask each person to share their thoughts. After we have discussed and created an understanding of what stress is, I will ask them to take a few minutes to read through the choices on the worksheet before filling it out, as I get the powerpoint set up for phase two of the workshop. (See Appendix A for worksheets.)

For the second phase of the workshop I will present a powerpoint with key information about stress. The first few slides will talk about what stress is, and what it can look like in the workplace, and how it can affect our important work as child care workers. While discussing the effects of stress I will have the participants begin to work on the worksheets and encourage them to talk to their peers while doing the worksheet. The two worksheets they are working on are used as tools for managing stress, the first worksheet is identifying stressors. The second is recognizing how we feel when reacting to stressors. Once everyone has completed the worksheets and we have discussed some sources of stress and how it can impact our lives, we will move on to the most important part of the presentation to me, which is how we can find

ways to cope and deal with stress, and better control our own stress responses. (See Appendix B for powerpoint slides)

The third phase of the workshop will emphasize the importance of developing healthy ways to cope and manage stress, and some time for group discussion to share ways we personally deal with stress, or means of self care that can help. I will share stress reducing techniques and have participants identify three techniques they can commit to using in the future when feeling those symptoms of stress they identified. Some techniques I will share with the participants will include exercising, getting quality sleep, and journaling or talking to a friend. After the participants have committed to at least three techniques, I will conclude the workshop with a period for questions, and thanking the participants and collecting the worksheets.

Results

Not completed due to Covid-19.

Discussion

Not completed due to Covid-19.

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Appendix A: (Stress worksheets)



IDENTIFYING YOUR STRESSORS worksheet

Use this tool to list your stressors. For each item on the list, mark whether or not it is long-term or short-term and whether or not you have control over it.

You might also try to avoid these stressors or limit exposure to them. If you can't avoid dealing with them, practicing deep breathing when you interact with them might limit your stress response.

☐ Adjusting to College Life

☐ Conflict With Family/Friend

☐ Keeping Healthy

☐ Preparing for Life After Graduation

☐ Lack of Confidence

☐ Money Worries

☐ Pain/Fatigue

☐ Academic Performance

☐ Public Speaking

☐ Loneliness

Other: _____

☐ Travel/Vacation/Holidays

☐ Time Management

☐ Interviewing

☐ Intimate Relationships

☐ Roommate Issues

Now, review your list of stressors and, for each one, ask:

- Is this long or short-term?
- Is this under my control?

List each of your stressors in the appropriate box below:

	Long-Term	Short-Term
Control		
Do Not Control		

- When possible, let go of the stressors that you identified as uncontrollable. They aren't worth the stress they cause. This is not always possible with major stressors, but making the choice to accept that some things are uncontrollable can help reduce the stress they cause.
- Take some time to address those stressors that you feel are under your control.
- Practice stress management techniques for the stressors that are uncontrollable. You might also avoid these stressors or limit exposure to them when possible.

• 5 •



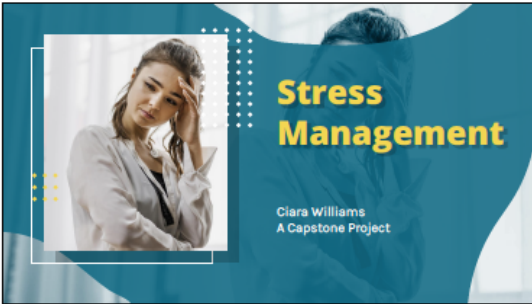
STRESS SYMPTOMS checklist

When you know how your body responds to stressors, you can focus your attention on finding the best stress management technique for each one. Check off the symptoms you experience when you're feeling a lot of stress.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Backache | <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle Cramps/Spasms | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Motivation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in Sex Drive | <input type="checkbox"/> Neck & Shoulder Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Loneliness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chest Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Pain | <input type="checkbox"/> Sadness or Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chest Tightness | <input type="checkbox"/> Sleep Problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Crying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digestive Issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Smoking | <input type="checkbox"/> Eating When Not Hungry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Muscle Tension | <input type="checkbox"/> Teeth Grinding | <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headache | <input type="checkbox"/> Upset Stomach/Nausea | <input type="checkbox"/> Irritability/Anger |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heart Palpitations | <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming | <input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression/Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Worrying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of Energy | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness | <input type="checkbox"/> Alcohol Use |

Other: _____

NOTE: Some of these symptoms can indicate a medical problem rather than stress. If you are experiencing any unusual symptoms or symptoms that are severe enough to prevent you from engaging in your daily activities, contact your healthcare provider right away.



Stress Management

Clara Williams
A Capstone Project

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Are You Relaxed?

Let's start with some ground walking meditation to get us all on the same vibe.

MINDFUL WALKING

01

Introduction

Making Connections

10 Things in Common

1. Introduce ourselves:
Name, Location you primarily work, department
Expectations + Open Space Message
Time: 5-8 min

2. Find a partner & write a list of ten thing you have in common.
Time: 3 min Max

3. Switch partners, flip paper & redo with new partner.
Share top 3-5 things found in common with the group.
10-15 Min

02

What is Stress ?

Markers
Grab one Marker or Sharpie and share your definition of stress on the mirror.

Brainstorm
Can we make a working definition ?

Stress
How the Brain & Body Respond to any demands or challenges.

Stressors
Identifying Stressors Worksheet
Work stressors

03

Stress in Action

Stress Symptoms Checklist



EFFECTS OF STRESS

01

Physical

- Aches and pains
- Chest pain or a feeling like your heart is racing
- Exhaustion or trouble sleeping
- Headaches, dizziness or shaking
- High blood pressure
- Muscle tension or jaw clenching
- Quality of care for self & others

02

Mental

- Long Term Mental Health problems
- Anxiety
- Depression,
- Substance abuse
- Attentiveness

04
Managing Stress

Healthy
It is important to choose healthy coping habits, to avoid negative impacts to overall wellness.

Variety
Have a range of techniques you can pull from, the same one may not work everytime, for every situation.

Malleable
Find what fits your needs best, modify and change suggested techniques to fit your needs.

STRESS IS A NORMAL PART OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

- Try Talking to a friend, colleague, family member, or even a professional. Journaling Can help too!
- Exercise
- Music
- Meditation
- YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

Do you have these moments too ?

Positive Affirmations & Commitment Statement

THE NEXT TIME I FEEL STRESSED I WILL (Pick 3, then record your commitment statements.)

<p>Phone a Friend</p> <p>Talk to someone, let them be your soundboard and just let it all out.</p>	<p>Music Therapy</p> <p>Rock or Mellow out for a bit, plug in and ignore the world.</p>	<p>Sleep</p> <p>Getting a good night's rest, and being fully rest each day before work can increase your mood and feelings towards the task ahead.</p>
<p>Time Management</p> <p>Maybe so no to some commitment, or change your schedule to reduce hours if it helps reduce any stress and anxiety.</p>	<p>Meditation</p> <p>Sit, Breath , Relax, Feel</p>	<p>Journaling</p> <p>Journaling can help as a form of self reflection and self regulation</p>

THANK YOU!

DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY QUESTIONS?

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